



news from the

Department of Community and Human Services

April 2013

Volume 15, Issue 2

Boards & Commissions

The following boards and commissions provide oversight and guidance to programs of the Department:

Alexandria Community Policy Management Team

Alexandria Community Services Board

Children, Youth & Families Collaborative Commission

Commission on Aging

Commission on Employment

Commission for Women

Economic Opportunities Commission

Social Services Advisory Board

Workforce Investment Board

In Our Own Voice (right) is a public education program developed by NAMI, in which trained speakers share compelling personal stories about living with a mental illness and achieving recovery. To learn more, visit www.NAMI-NorthernVirginia.org.

In Our Own Voice: Mental Illness and Recovery

Peter and Lorin were on the threshold of adulthood when their lives changed dramatically. Peter was a college student with a drinking problem, diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. Lorin was looking forward to college graduation when her 17-year-old brother committed suicide. The shock sent her into a tailspin of anxiety and depression.



Peter and Lorin tell their personal stories.

The two young adults shared their stories at an *In Our Own Voice* presentation at the Lyceum. The event included a video showing persons living with mental illness and describing components of their recovery: Dark Days, Acceptance, Treatment, Coping Skills, Successes, Hope and Dreams. Interspersed between video segments, Peter and Lorin described their experiences.

Peter's dark days started with substance abuse. After countless blackouts and an intervention, Peter went to rehab. After becoming clean, he suffered a full-blown mania with delusions and hallucinations. "I went to the DMV to renew my license and I could hear people around me chatting, and then all of the sudden I could hear their thoughts," he recounted. Some of the other feelings he struggled with were despair, grandiosity, pity, demoralization when he was hospitalized, and hopelessness.

Lorin's dark days began when her brother took his life. She was two months shy of graduating and had job offers. Suddenly she found that activities that had been easy for her like reading a book or having a conversation became difficult. Severe anxiety made her feel like she wanted to get out of her head. She spent her days grieving her brother and her old life and hating the way her life had changed.

Lorin received her degree that June and went to work as an analyst for an investment bank. But when her mood swings became difficult, she moved home to work on recovery. "Acceptance has been the hardest thing for me," Lorin told the audience. "When I went to see a psychologist for the first time, I expected her to tell me what I could do to feel better, and then I would do it and feel better. But I was in for a surprise." "She told me that recovery is a long journey and progress isn't instantaneous, which was very hard for me to comprehend," Lorin continued.

"The second aspect of mental illness that was difficult was accepting where I am on the journey." Peter's journey first required that he accept being an alcoholic. "Once I accepted that I was an alcoholic, I went to the first meeting I could find near the college campus," he recalled. "It happened to be a 40-and-up gay men's meeting. I looked a little out of place," he said with a chuckle, "but after listening to their stories, I broke down and shared mine." The next time of acceptance was when he was discharged from a hospital with a mental illness diagnosis.

Lorin cares for herself through therapy and yoga. Peter has found the Peer to Peer Program offered by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to be supportive. This program teaches coping strategies, relapse prevention, accessing help and survival skills for dealing with providers and the public.

***A Caring
Community
Promoting Respect,
Recovery, Hope***

City Takes New Approach to Homeless Services

Being homeless can describe a number of situations and can come from a number of causes. For years, the common remedy for homelessness, no matter the situation or cause, was emergency shelter.

Then, in 2005 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) conducted research revealing that not all persons seeking emergency shelter needed such a critical level of services. As a result the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development recommended that service providers create a means to determine which persons are truly homeless, literally having nowhere to go.

Responding to that change in approach, the Partnership to Prevent and End Homelessness in the City of Alexandria reviewed how services were offered and looked at ways to streamline the intake process, better utilize community resources, standardize assessment forms, and reduce the number of households entering the shelter system. The outcome of the review is the new Homeless Services Centralized Intake System.

The Homeless Services Assessment Center is the point of entry for anyone seeking shelter. Individuals without children can request services and are screened for eligibility and need at David's Place, a drop-in space in Carpenter's Shelter. Families are screened at the Department of Community Services on Mt. Vernon Ave.

Staff is trained in assessment, verification, referral, motivational interviewing, crisis response/de-escalation, and the Mental Health First Aid response system. "The bottom line," said Lesa Gilbert, Homeless Services Coordinator, "is to make the best referral possible, and also to divert wherever possible. We're making sure that the people placed in the shelter need the shelter. In the past, people would request emergency shelter because they were not getting along with family members or they were leaving relationships" or some other non-emergency reason.

"The new screening ensures that only people who are in a crisis situation or are literally homeless, are going to shelters," added Deanna Villanueva, Homeless Services Resource Manager. "By screening for shelter eligibility, we ask basic questions such as 'have you been homeless before? What was the outcome if you were previously homeless? Who is your family? Who do you go to when you need money? Can someone provide room for you?'"

"The screener is looking for any possibility that the person can be diverted," Gilbert explained. "With diversion we're looking at whether we're able to maintain their current housing, whether it's helping them pay their rent for the month because they lost their job or resolving a conflict with their landlord or helping the person return to their family in North Carolina or New York."

An added bonus to the new system is expanded data collection. While the previous shelter intake system provided immediate remedy, it did not capture information on the persons requesting shelter and did not provide a good tracking system for outcomes for the individuals and families. Because all the forms are now standardized, all shelters are collecting the same data. "What we're seeing is we're not placing as many families in shelters as we did in the past. We're diverting them to their household or to their communities. The same is true for individuals. We ask about their support system — anyone they can stay with for a short period of time — and what kind of case management can we provide to help them get back their feet."

"Moving families to housing within Alexandria is very difficult," she added, "but the Rapid Re-Housing Program (a federal program that provides financial assistance and services to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless) is statewide so the people can move anywhere in the state. Often the locations are in Fairfax or Prince Williams counties. There's also transitional housing for some and housing through the DCHS residential program for others. We have housing locators and housing resource coordinators in Alexandria to work with landlords and management companies to help place clients with high barriers such as criminal convictions or multiple evictions."

Overall the new system, say all involved, has had a significant impact in terms of making sure those who really need shelter aren't falling through the cracks and people who have other options are being diverted.



Representatives of the Partnership to Prevent and End Homelessness in the City of Alexandria Interagency Work Group.

Back Row (Left to Right) Yvonne Kedoin (Alexandria Community Shelter/New Hope Housing, Inc.), Deanna Villanueva (Carpenter's Shelter), Mary-Parker Lamm (Carpenter's Shelter), Lesa Gilbert (DCHS), Dimitri Warren (DCHS).

Front Row (Left to Right) Michele Smith (Christ Church), Kevin Mondloch (Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington - Christ House), Nicole Goodman (ALIVE! House), Susan Keenan (New Hope Housing, Inc.)

Family Child Care Providers Welcome Portage Assessment Tool

The Resource Unit in the Early Childhood Division launched the Portage curriculum with a group of family child care providers who are interested in expanding their knowledge and skills in early childhood development. Resource Team supervisor Lillian Vagnoni and the child care specialists who work with providers to increase their quality of care, Natalia Spinner, Rosa Chavez and Kashawna Watson, trained 10 family child care providers in the use of the Portage developmental and emotional assessment tool. Portage is an assessment that looks at early childhood development in areas such as language, social-emotional, exploration, motor activity and sensory organization.

The goal of this project is to work closely with family child care providers and the families they serve to identify children who are exhibiting developmental delays and to assist providers in planning daily curriculum activities to address the delays and help them grow. The children can also be referred to programs such as PIE, CATCH and Child Find. For children without delays, the program provides activities to enhance school readiness for entering kindergarten.

To support this goal, the participating providers will receive monthly mentoring visits from their child specialists. This affords the provider the opportunity to receive support for challenges and/or successes in implementing and utilizing the tool. This event was very well received by the family child care providers who are eager to expand their knowledge and skills in early childhood development.



Natalia Spinner, right, child care specialist, talks with child care provider Fatoumata Sidibe.

National Child Abuse Prevention Month

In recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month, this April the City of Alexandria is offering free child abuse prevention activities sponsored by the Center for Alexandria's Children, the Department of Community and Human Services, the Alexandria Police Department and the Alexandria Sheriff's Office.

City staff will provide families with [SafeAssured Child ID kits](#) April 27 at Charles Houston Recreation Center, from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., and again May 11 at Children's Mental Health Fun Fair at the lot by Tenants and Workers United, 3801 Mt. Vernon Ave. SafeAssured kits provide families with information needed by law enforcement and media to broadcast information unique to a missing child.

The Center for Alexandria's Children will offer free training in Stewards of Children, a program that teaches parents and caregivers to prevent, recognize and respond to child sexual abuse. A training is scheduled for Tuesday, April 30, from 3 p.m. - 6 p.m. at 1900 N. Beauregard St., Suite 200. On-site childcare and pizza for the kids provided. Register at: <http://cacestewardsofchildrentraining.eventbrite.com/>. This training is ongoing. See the Center for Alexandria's Children's website for future dates.

The popular playgroup program for children ages 0-5 will be expanded to a playgroup a day during April. Playgroups focus

on learning through play, and the key role parents play in their child's development. Visit <http://centerforalexandriaschildren.org/> for a list of playgroups.



Photos and video are part of the SafeAssured child safety kits.

Last year, 49,619 children in Virginia were reported as possible victims of abuse and/or neglect. Of them, 6,116 cases were founded. Thirty Virginia children died from abuse, and 26 were under age 4.

"National tragedies such as Sandy Hook and the Penn State scandal remind us of our children's vulnerability," Center for Alexandria's Children Executive Director Giselle

Pelaez said. "We can stop child abuse and neglect by educating our community in ways to keep our children safe, teaching children important safety tips and helping parents and caregivers create conversations with their children."

For more information, contact Jennifer Cann, DCHS Child Protective Services Program Manager, at Jennifer.cann@alexandriava.gov or 703.746.5767, or Kim Turpin-Davis, Board Chair of Communications for the Center for Alexandria's Children, at kturpindavis@aol.com or 703.549.3741.

Dance Party for Youth Brings Community Together

Rarely do children and adults from different neighborhoods come together for a social activity, but Hip-Hop for the Heart was the successful exception. This event, which was held in February at the Durant Center, is the creation of Catherine Joyce, a volunteer for the Fund for Alexandria's Child.

Stemming from an assignment in a leadership class and from her volunteer experience with *The Fund*, Joyce engaged a variety of youth groups, City agencies, her children, her neighbor's children, and local merchants to produce "Hip Hop for Heart," a dance-focused, activity-laden gathering, appealing to both youngsters and parents.

A goal of the activity was to bring together young people and their families of all ages and all neighborhoods who do not ordinarily have a chance to interact, including children in foster care, who receive enrichment support from *The Fund for Alexandria's Child*. Another goal was to provide community service opportunities. Youth groups and adults were invited not only to attend the party, but to volunteer their time, creativity and resources.

A group of DCHS social workers teamed up with Joyce to pull together a big project in just three weeks. Among the groups that participated were: Girl Scout Cadet Troop 1330 and Senior Troop 1797 from Alfred Street Baptist Church; Cadet Troop #841, service unit 5306; Brownie Troop #4557 from Charles Barrett School; and Burgundy Farm mid-school community service students. Many community members contributed children's books, including all the Alfred Street Baptist Church girl scouts, so that each child left with at least one book.

A DJ, dancer and magician provided entertainment and volunteers led craft activities. Many participants took home beautiful beaded items and colorful pinwheels. NOVA Photo Booth provided photo opportunities.

In the end, almost 300 people, including children and adults, participated in Hip Hop for Heart. A volunteer commented, "Thanks for allowing us to be a part of (Hip Hop for Heart). It was nice to do something for the foster parent community that we don't often hear about." Said another, "When I witnessed that room filled with kids dancing –



Members of Girls Scout Troop 841, from left, Destiny Ellis, Sheridan Lusk and Kennedi Roland.

of all ages and backgrounds – I felt tears of joy come into my own eyes." In response to popular demand, Hip Hop for Heart will take place again next year. Save the date: February 15, 2014!

April is Children's Mental Health Month!

Join us for a Fun Fair in celebration of National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day. Let your children enjoy clowns, arts and crafts, prizes and games, popcorn and more while you learn how to promote their resiliency from birth to adulthood.



Saturday, May 11
Lot at Tenants and Workers United
3801 Mount Vernon Avenue,
Alexandria, VA 22305
1 p.m. – 5 p.m.

Hosted by the Department of Community and Human Services Center for Children and Families in partnership with Tenants and Workers United and the Center for Alexandria's Children.

The Fund for Alexandria's Child Cruise Coming in June

The 10th Anniversary Fostering the Future Cruise "A Little DECOdence — Celebrating 10 Years of Empowering Foster Families" will take place aboard the Cherry Blossom paddle wheel boat on Thursday, June 27, at the City Marina in Old Town Alexandria. The dockside reception begins at 7 p.m., with departure at 8:30 with full buffet and drinks from Mango Mike's, and dancing and the scenic monument cruise until 10 p.m. Entertainment is by the Town House Band (formerly known as Who's Ya Daddy?) famous for their jazz and contemporary playlist. Tickets are available at the early-bird rate of \$75 per person until June 1. After that, the price is \$85 per person (for adults only, please). Cost is tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Attire is 1920s jazzy casual. To reserve your space or for more information, call 703.746.5663 or email thefundforalexchild@alexandriava.gov. Visit www.alexandriava.gov/thefundforalexchild to learn more.

City Women Honored for Service to Community

Nearly 200 people attended the Alexandria Commission for Women's 33rd Annual Salute to Women Awards Banquet on March 18 to honor 11 outstanding women nominated by fellow residents for their valuable contributions to the Alexandria community. The event is held with support from the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services each year during Women's History Month.

Presiding over the banquet, Commission for Women Chair Elizabeth Johnson warmly welcomed all award nominees. Eleven nominees were announced as award winners and recognized by Councilwoman Redella S. "Del" Pepper, Virginia Delegate Charniele Herring, former Virginia Delegate Marian Van Landingham, former City Manager Vola Lawson, Mel Bergheim and Jim Butler.

The 2013 Awardees, who were selected by an independent committee appointed by the Commission, are:
Brooke Curran—Rising Star Award
Becky Davies—Making a Difference Award
Faye Gunn—Making a Difference Award

Monika Jones—Rising Star Award
Erika Kleiner—Women's Health and Safety Advocate Award
Pat Miller—Susan Lowell Butler Lifetime Achievement Award
Karyn Moran—Youth Community Services Award
Monika Reid—Marian Van Landingham Legislation and Public Policy Award
Nina Tisara—Donna Bergheim Cultural Affairs Award
Elizabeth Todd—Leadership in Business and Career Development Award
Robin Wallin—Vola Lawson Award

Proceeds from this event support Alexandria's Sexual Assault Center, which provides critical services to victims of sexual assault including a 24-hour hotline that offers victim advocacy, counseling and support services – and school education programs.

For more information on the Salute to Women Awards or the services of the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services, visit alexandriava.gov/women.



*Front row, left to right, Monika Reid, Nina Tisara, Robin Wallin, Becky Davies, Faye Gunn
Back row, left to right, Liz Johnson (Commission Chair), Erika Kleiner, Monika Jones, Pat Miller*

Panel to Discuss Mental Health Legislation

Delegate Rob Krupicka, District 45, and members of the General Assembly will discuss mental health legislation that passed this session and work that's yet to be done. Learn about Mental Health First Aid for Youth, a new program providing education for parents and those who work with children, and discover what mental health services are available for children and youth from local Community Services boards (CSBs) and what is needed.

The event will be held Saturday, May 18, at the Lee Center, 1108 Jefferson St., Alexandria, 22314. A social meet and greet session will begin at 11:30 a.m. The forum and panel discussion will start at noon and end at 2 p.m. Childcare is available for ages four and up. For childcare reservations, email donielle.marshall@alexandriava.gov or call 703.746.3523.

Online Alcohol Screening

April is Alcohol Awareness Month, a time to focus on a vast, and often unseen, problem.

Excessive alcohol use accounted for an estimated average of 80,000 deaths and 2.3 million years of potential life lost in the U.S. each year during 2001-2005, and the economic costs of alcohol abuse in the United States are estimated to be approximately \$185 billion annually.

Perhaps most disturbing is the fact that alcohol is a problem across all demographics, including children: approximately 20 percent of 8th graders, 35

percent of 10th graders, and 48 percent of 12th graders report having consumed alcohol during the past month.

**How
much
is too
much?**

We encourage those who drink alcohol to take advantage of an anonymous, alcohol self-assessment. Whether it's you, a family member, or a friend, the few minutes it takes to complete the assessment is time well spent.

Go to www.alexandriava.gov/DCHS to take your free alcohol self-assessment.

To make comments or suggestions for story ideas, contact Jennifer Cohen at 703.746.3484 or email at jennifer.cohen@alexandriava.gov.



Access the City of Alexandria's pages on Twitter and Facebook. Connect today at alexandriava.gov/Twitter and alexandriava.gov/Facebook to receive up-to-the minute information about City news, events, initiatives and more.



Department of Community & Human Services
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